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ABSTRACT

This report presents eight examples of approaches used by local providers, employers, and unions in Illinois to make basic skills programs available to workers. The programs profiled are the following: Rockford Area Literacy Council--Project READ '86-'89; Highland Community College--Literacy Outreach Program for Northwest Illinois; Waukegan Public Library--Libraries for Literacy in Lake County; Regional Office of Education--Project U.P.W.A.R.D. (United Peoria Working on Adult Reading Development); Rolling Prairie Library System--Project READ, Decatur; Lake Land Community College--Project PAL (Partners in Adult Literacy), Mattoon; Lawrence Adult Center--VIA (Volunteers in Action)/Literacy, Springfield; and CEFS Economic Opportunity Corporation--CEFS Literacy Program, Effingham. Each profile provides a narrative summary of the scope and methods of the program, with such information as number served, businesses involved, funding, successful techniques for recruiting businesses and students, and a name and telephone number for the project coordinator. A discussion of the issues involved in workplace literacy programs is included in the report. (KC)

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TOWARD A MORE LITERATE WORKFORCE:

The Emergence of Workplace Literacy Programs in Illinois

"There are great possibilities in programs which bring adult education professionals into the office or factory to combine instruction with the specific needs of the workplace. It is a lot easier to motivate someone to read if they can see direct practical benefits in their day-to-day work."

Secretary of State Jim Edgar
Chairman, Illinois Literacy Council

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TOWARD A MORE LITERATE WORKFORCE:

The Emergence of Workplace Literacy Programs in Illinois

"I do not believe any large employer can safely say that 100 percent of his or her employees have reading skills adequate to function efficiently and productively in today's technical workplace."
Secretary of State Jim Edgar

AWARENESS LEADS TO ACTION

Awareness of the problem of adult illiteracy and its scope has grown considerably in Illinois since the establishment of the Illinois literacy effort in May 1984. Businesses are paying particular attention to the issue. Many are aware that their companies helped pay close to $840 million for unemployment insurance in this state last year. Many are aware that not only unemployment, but lost industrial productivity, unrealized tax revenues, worker dislocation, and the high cost of public assistance can be directly linked to a lack of basic reading skills on the part of at least two million adults in Illinois. In many cases, this awareness has led to action.

More than 400 Illinois businesses are reported to be involved in supporting local literacy programs. Business support ranges from inkind donations of personnel, equipment, tutoring space, promotional materials and encouragement of employee participation in volunteer tutoring, to direct financial support and technical assistance.

Symbolizing a trend toward public/private partnerships in support of literacy, more than 200 Illinois businesses lent their names, last year, to

a poster which encouraged high schoolers to stay in school. The bright yellow poster asks the question: "WHO SAYS YOU NEED A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA?" and answers it with a list of the 213 businesses. The poster was developed by the Public Information Subcommittee of the Illinois Literacy Council, with input from the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce and the Chicago Advertising Club. It was distributed throughout Illinois by the Secretary of State's Literacy Office.

The Illinois Literacy Council, a 36-member body representing Illinois business, labor, education, library, government and volunteer organizations was established in 1984 to address the issue of adult illiteracy. Under the leadership of Secretary of State and State Librarian Jim Edgar, the Council has mounted a statewide public awareness campaign and advocated for both public and private funding support for local literacy programs.

In July 1985 the Secretary of State's Literacy Grant Program was established by the Illinois General Assembly. To date, $10 million has been appropriated for this program and allocated to more than 250 local and regional programs and satellites to serve 25,000 adult new readers and to train 20,000 volunteers reading tutors.

Efforts to involve the private sector in the literacy effort culminated in the formation, in August 1987 of a Business and Labor Advisory Committee to the Illinois Literacy Council. Serving on the committee are union and business leaders from across the state who advise and guide the Illinois Literacy Council on ways in which to involve businesses and labor organizations more closely with local adult literacy programs. Those serving on the committee bring with them various experiences as supporters and promoters of adult literacy. Many have been active on local literacy

coalitions. Others have given time, talent, and resources to local literacy providers. Still others are developing basic skills programs for their own employees or union members. More than 80 such programs are known to be underway in Illinois.

This report presents eight examples of approaches used by local providers, employers, and unions to make basic skills programs available to workers.

The information was gathered by Secretary of State Press Office Summer Intern Robert Renner through visits to selected workplace sites and interviews with managers, union leaders, and literacy program coordinators.

ROCKFORD AREA LITERACY COUNCIL
"Project READ '86-'89"
Cynthia Smith, Executive Director
815/963-7323

"The tough part is penetrating the workforce to break the facade and show that this isn't being used to terminate employees."

John Holub
Executive Director
Rockford Chamber of Commerce

Currently working with nine businesses, the Rockford Area Literacy Council (RALC) has launched a three-year fundraising and media awareness campaign. Last year, RALC raised more than $63,850 from private sources for Project READ '86-'89. The incorporated Council is seeking to match the funding it receives through the Secretary of State's literacy grants with donations from area businesses.

Working closely with the Rockford Chamber of Commerce, RALC executive director Cynthia Smith invited area businessmen to four "literacy breakfasts" in late 1986. There she presented statistics on the extent of adult illiteracy in the state and surrounding counties. Of the 160,000 people age 18 and over, an estimated 69,000 in Winnebago and Boone counties have less than a high school education, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Smith also brought a literacy tutor and student to the meetings to speak firsthand about their experiences in the RALC literacy program.

One program set up through RALC and Rock Valley College was at the Pillsbury/Green Giant Company in Belvidere. The company had been initiating a "Total Quality" program when management recognized that

workers for whom English was a second language and workers with low reading skills fell short of expected standards.

In particular, the company learned that some of its 38 forklift operators were unable to read adequately enough to fill out shipping forms correctly, requiring extra assistance from their coworkers and supervisors. As a result, the company requested that RALC administer a math and reading locator test. Workers were told that test results would remain confidential and that no one would be dismissed due to low test scores.

A four-month, onsite class was set up for seven people who tested below the 6th grade level. One individual, with very low reading skills, was offered one-on-one tutoring. Workers involved in class and tutoring instruction are given overtime pay when they attend class before or after their work shifts. The company provides the reading materials and the class space. Class attendance is mandatory and students must demonstrate progress in the program.

When the class ended in September 1987, human resources manager Don Schneider reviewed employee progress and renewed the program, expanding it to include Pillsbury/Green Giant's maintenance department. With new equipment constantly being installed and serviced Schneider felt there was a crucial need for workers in the department to be stronger readers.

At the Chrysler Corporation assembly plant in Belvidere, about 70 employees have enrolled in General Educational Development (GED) and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) classes which were advertised in a flyer distributed by RALC. In addition, more than 40 workers at the plant have been linked with volunteer reading tutors. The classes, which began in March 1987, are held at the United Auto Workers Local 1268 union

hall. The classes are a U.A.W./Chrysler joint effort in providing education programs as ratified in the union contract. New this summer will be a peer tutoring program, to begin after employee volunteers complete tutor training workshops offered by RALC.

In addition, the Chrysler Corporation has pledged $6000 over the next three years to the RALC effort. The Chrysler donation is voluntary. RALC does not require businesses with whom they work in setting up education programs to provide donations.

Representatives from RALC and all participating businesses and unions meet regularly to insure that satisfactory progress is being made in the programs, both for employers and employees.

Other businesses that have recently established workplace literacy programs with assistance from RALC include Spider Company, Clock Tower Resort, and Stonegate Nursery, which have established onsite English as a Second Language classes, and Midwest Plating Company, which has established an onsite basic skills class. Midwest Plating provides release time, the cost of the instructor, and all materials. Approximately 24 workers attend class after 12 and 14 hour shifts. "They are a dedicated group of students," reports Smith.

Clock Tower Resort allows employees to use the last hour of their workday to attend class. Housekeeping operations are suspended during that time to allow the resort's 32 Hispanic and Indo-Chinese housekeepers and kitchen workers to advance their language and reading skills.

Resuming an ESL workplace after a winter hiatus from Stonegate Nursery will be 23 Hispanic workers who are pleased to be able to learn the English names for plants, materials and tools they use. Smith reports that 100 percent of Stonegate's gardening staff enrolled in the program.

In addition to the workplace programs at Pillsbury/Green Giant, Chrysler, Spider Company, Clock Tower Resort, Stonegate Nursery and Midwest Plating, workplace programs are in the developmental stages at Elco Industries, Atwood Industries and Warner Brake and Clutch.

Other Rockford area businesses that have contacted Smith to discuss the development of workplace programs include Rockford Memorial, Swedish American and St. Anthony's hospitals.

Smith says she is encouraged by the progress of the effort to date. She estimates that 200 employees from area businesses have been placed in classes through Rock Valley College, and more than 400 students have been linked with volunteer reading tutors through RALC. But she expresses concern for the future. Like Chrysler, many businesses have donated money to help workplace literacy programs "get off the ground." But, businesses are anxious about the lack of permanent literacy funding sources. "Public policy is in place. Now it must be coupled with hard money at the state and national levels" she says.

HIGHLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE
"Literacy Outreach Program for Northwest Illinois"
Freeport
Lin Baer, Business/Industry Liaison
815/235-6121 x217

"Before, the emphasis was on training -- how to train someone to do one job. Now, business leaders are starting to realize that the person has to be able to receive the training."

Craig Knaack
Director of Adult and Continuing Education
Highland Community College

Since its initial contact with area businesses in late 1984, Highland Community College (HCC) has established programs in five Freeport companies and four businesses in its outreach area. Lin Baer, business/industry liaison at HCC, usually begins by writing a letter to the company introducing the idea of a literacy program. She then makes telephone follow-up calls and meets personally with the appropriate business contact to discuss the business needs and preferred approach to the development of a program. One such approach is to meet individually with workers to discuss the types of classes offered at the college. She said businesses have generally recognized the need to set up some type of literacy program. To date, 67 employees from area businesses with reading skills below the sixth grade level have come forward for help.

Kelly-Springfield Tire Company turned to the HCC program in 1985, when concern was raised about whether employees would be able to read the manual for an improved communications training class the company was about to offer. HCC administered the Nelson-Denny Standard College Admission Test to 1200 employees who volunteered to be tested, and found that 232 were

reading below the sixth grade level. While some workers took immediate advantage of educational opportunities available through HCC, others waited for company encouragement.

In early 1986, the company sent letters to all employees describing what HCC offered and encouraged employee enrollment. In addition, Baer was invited to the plant to discuss the classes with employees on an individual basis.

In the spring of 1987, an even stronger effort began when the company, in cooperation with United Rubber Workers Local 745, provided company "facilitators" to help those having reading difficulties fill out an employee attitude survey. The facilitators encouraged these employees to seek assistance from HCC. Plant manager Wilbur Masters addressed workers in a series of meetings and urged them to take advantage of the classes at the college. He pointed out that doing so would help them retain their jobs as the company moved toward greater automation, and emphasized that enrollment in a basic skills class would not jeopardize their status with the company.

Another Freeport company, Micro Switch, a division of Honeywell, Inc., has had a longterm commitment to the training needs of its employees. In August 1986 it expanded that commitment, arranging for Lin Baer to inform employees about the educational opportunities available at HCC, including the basic skills program. Department supervisors were asked to encourage and facilitate employee attendance at the hour-long informational meetings. A management-oriented newsletter highlighted the need to direct workers to HCC's basic skills program, stressing the importance of approaching workers in nonthreatening and nonjudgemental ways.

In January 1987, after being named to the Highland Area Literacy

Council Advisory Board and attending a kickoff event, Micro Switch general manager Jim Skyrms became an even stronger supporter of basic skills classes for employees. Efforts to involve more management-level people in promoting basic skills classes resulted in nine additional students coming forward for instruction, for a total of 19 employees enrolled in HCC's program. An organizational restructure in the plant also contributed to employee interest.

Ellis Stewart, director of manufacturing and quality, says of the effort to involve Micro Switch employees in basic skills programs: "This company had articulated that there's a need for engineers to keep up with technology, but something that may not have been articulated as well was the need to provide basic educational opportunities to all employees in all areas. I guess we had a basic built-in assumption that everyone could read."

While Kelly-Springfield Tire and Micro Switch steered their employees to off-site courses, a third company, Halsey Taylor/Thermos arranged for HCC to conduct an onsite literacy program. Since the fall of 1986, two basic skills classes have been held each week, with employees grouped according to their reading level. The program is supported by the International Association of Machinists Local 1096 as well as management.

WAUKEGAN PUBLIC LIBRARY
"Libraries for Literacy in Lake County"
Carol Morris, Literacy Coordinator
312/623-2041

"Most literacy coordinators will tell you -- flexibility is the key. Whether you are talking about developing a learning program that fits a particular student's needs, or a learning program that fits a particular company's needs, you have to realize there isn't one right approach that works for everybody."

Carol Martinez
Assistant Coordinator
Libraries for Literacy

Working actively with approximately 70 Lake County businesses is a literacy project coordinated by the Waukegan Public Library, in cooperation with the College of Lake County, Literacy Volunteers of America, and 17 Lake County libraries. "Libraries for Literacy in Lake County" became involved with many of the businesses through an information and interest survey conducted in March 1987 by assistant coordinator Carol Martinez.

Two workplace literacy programs are currently underway, both offering English as a Second Language instruction. The first was established in cooperation with the Villa St. Cyril nursing home in Highland Park, where an onsite program teaches English skills to Spanish- and Polish-speaking housekeepers and kitchen workers. Ten employees are currently involved. The class has the support of the administration and meets once a week during the employees' lunch hour.

A second onsite English as a Second Language program is scheduled to begin in late April 1988 at Synnestvedt Nursery in Round Lake. Approximately 25 nursery and landscaping employees will learn work-oriented

terminology twice weekly for 12 weeks. The class will be held immediately after work. Employees will receive $150 upon "successful completion" of the course. "Success" will be based on attendance and measurable improvement in speaking and understanding English.

Instructor Dena Staben, ESL Coordinator at College of Lake County, will take students into the machine shed and greenhouse to teach the specialized curriculum, developed with help from English-speaking crew managers. Volunteer tutors, some of them Synnestvedt employees, will assist with the multi-level class.

"We can't wait to begin assessing employee skills," says Carol Morris, Libraries for Literacy program coordinator. "This class ought to be a joy. Everyone, including the instructor, can wear jeans and relax and have fun out there in the greenhouse."

Morris said volunteers will play an important part in the Synnestvedt program. Aside from classroom tutoring, volunteers will hold informal conversation sessions twice weekly during worker lunch hours.

"Employees have a 60-minute lunch period," says Morris. "Most workers eat in 20 minutes and speak Spanish to each other for 40 minutes. By building on what is being introduced in the class, we hope to get them conversing in English." They also plan to give workers information about community resources, such as the library, during the lunch periods.

The Round Lake nursery is one of three Synnestvedt sites. If successful, the program will be emulated at Synnestvedt sites in Evanston and in a west Chicago location. Morris has already given nursery owner Ralph Synnestredt the names of local literacy coordinators in those areas.

REGIONAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION
"Project U.P.W.A.R.D."
Peoria
Dottie Gibson, Literacy Coordinator
309/672-6906

"It's time we got our heads out of the sand and stopped saying we'll find other workers to replace those who can't read."

Tony Green
President
United Auto Workers Local 974

In Peoria, a joint workplace literacy effort between a union and an education agency began in September 1986 after a meeting between Project U.P.W.A.R.D. (United Peoria Working on Adult Reading Development) and United Auto Workers Local 974 representatives. Coordinator Dottie Gibson learned that UAW president Tony Green was interested in using her project to deliver a literacy program for union members.

After a series of delays due to union elections and contract talks with Caterpillar, a GED class was established at the union hall in March 1988. The class serves unemployed workers, union and non-union alike, free of charge, through Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds. Nine students currently meet with two certified instructors. The class meets twice weekly. Supplementary one-on-one tutoring is available.

Gibson and Green would like to be able to open the class to employed workers, many of whom have asked to attend, but the funding mechanism prevents it. Employed workers who read below the sixth grade level can, however, receive instruction through Project U.P.W.A.R.D.'s adult literacy program. More advanced readers can enroll in a GED class at Illinois Central College (ICC). But Gibson reports that transportation,

scheduling, and "lack of confidence" prevents many GED aspirants from enrolling at ICC.

"Some of these people dropped out of school in the lower grades," says Gibson. "They don't feel confident or equipped to go to the college site." Her goal is to offer workers the instruction they what at the union hall or the workplace.

Green hopes the union program can expand. Through direct inquiries, union files and plant supervisor referrals, he has identified 30 union members at Caterpillar, alone, in need of reading assistance. Labor leaders at UAW 1494, Rohn Manufacturing, say they have workers who would also like to participate.

Representatives from Project U.P.W.A.R.D. have begun to contact other unions in the area to promote reading services. Reactions have been mixed. Some union leaders have been receptive to the idea, others are hesitant. "When I discuss some of the coping skills used by nonreaders, such as saying they 'forgot' their glasses when handed a form to read and fill out, or wanting to take the form home to complete, then those who were skeptical begin to realize a reading problem might exist among some of their members" says Program Assistant Juliette Whittaker.

Rolling Prairie Library System
"Project READ"
Decatur
Janna Lutovsky, Director
217/423-2360

"We must not lose sight of the relation between education and jobs. I hope the success of our cooperation here in Decatur will set an example that other JTPA administrators can use in working with literacy groups in their areas."

John Roark
JTPA Regional Director
Decatur

After sending brochures to Decatur-area businesses in December 1986, Project READ director Janna Lutovsky's first response was from the City of Decatur. Following meetings with department heads in January 1987, 13 employees were enrolled in a General Educational Development (GED) class and five employees, who lacked adequate reading skills, were linked with volunteer reading tutors.

In March 1988, the Decatur Housing Authority (DHA) began a basic reading program for its maintenance staff. The multi-level class meets in a DHA facility in downtown Decatur Monday through Thursday from 4:00 - 5:30 p.m. Employees are given one half hour release time to attend the class, which is taught by a Richland Community College instructor.

"Initial contact was made with DHA nearly two years ago," says Lutovsky. "Sometime you just have to wait for the business timing to be right."

Revere Ware, Inc., in nearby Clinton, set up a program over a year ago with the help of Susan Cooper, the Project READ literacy coordinator

for that area. Cooper talked with employees at the company and then administered a reading test, after which 30 employees enrolled in a GED class. The company offered a $100 savings bond as an incentive for completion of the course. For those volunteering to take the GED completion test, the company will provide a $25 gift certificate for use at a local restaurant. In addition, eight employees with lower reading levels are receiving tutoring from volunteers.

Project READ representatives keep in touch with many businesses. Wagner Manufacturing and Archer Daniels Midland have included notices about basic reading and GED instruction in employee pay checks. More than 25 students have come the Project READ as a result. Wagner and Caterpillar have also printed articles about Project READ in company newsletters.

Further cooperation with Project READ is provided through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Regional Office. The office uses Project READ as a referral mechanism for those needing improved reading skills. JTPA regional director John Roark estimates that one-half of the applicants to the JTPA program are high school dropouts. After completing the literacy program, JTPA clients are placed in jobs or in on-the-job training. Roark estimates that he referred more than 100 people through Project READ last year. In exchange for the service, the JTPA office provides office space, equipment use, and class space to Project READ.

In the summer of 1987, the cooperative Project READ/JTPA effort expanded to include an innovative "READ in the PARKS" program. At twelve area parks, 60 trained JTPA youth participants, under the supervision of a group leader, acted as peer reading tutors both to improve their own reading skills and provide assistance to other young students and their

families. The program, funded by the local Private Industry Council (PIC), was developed by the Decatur Summer Park Committee for Literacy which includes representatives from the Decatur School District, the Junior Welfare Association, JTPA, Project READ, the Decatur Public Library, radio station WDZ and the Decatur Herald & Review. It was coordinated by Project READ.

The Decatur Herald & Review also cooperates with Project READ in providing a monthly newspaper supplement for those who are learning how to read. Read: The News uses simple vocabulary and larger print to present the top news stories each month. The publication is circulated with the regular paper and used as a teaching tool in area literacy programs as well as an information source for adult new readers.

"There are many different ways that the business community can help in the literacy effort," says Lutovsky. "We have been fortunate in the variety of ideas business has offered to us when we've sought their involvement."

LAKE LAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE
"Project P.A.L."
Mattoon
Pat Hemmett, Literacy Coordinator
217/235-3131 x240

"In rural communities, students are concerned about confidentiality. This makes them slow to come forward and ask for reading assistance. Workplace programs provide an alternative route to reaching reluctant students."

Pat Hemmett
District Coordinator
Project PAL

The Lake Land Community College (LLCC) literacy program, known as Project P.A.L. (Partners in Adult Literacy), covers a predominantly rural 4000 square mile area, making tutor/student matches a sometimes difficult matter. The program was delighted to find, in December 1986, a cabinet manufacturing company in Arthur that was interested in organizing a workplace literacy program. Jerry Ray, former personnel manager and current plant superintendent at Schrock/WCI, contacted the Mattoon-based program after hearing about the program at a local Rotary meeting. Several months later, he arranged for a P.A.L. representative to speak to Schrock's 480 employees.

Following the meeting, 40 employees came forward for assistance. In May 1987 they were assessed by Project P.A.L. staff, using the Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT). Those with high test scores were referred to appropriate LLCC programs. Of those in the lower range, five signed up to be tutored one-on-one. One student chose to be tutored onsite. The others, concerned about confidentiality, chose to be tutored offsite at area libraries.

By September 1987, eleven workers were receiving one-on-one

instruction in library settings. At that time, a basic skills class was established, onsite, through the adult education department at Lake Land Community College. Schrock provided tuition reimbursement for workers who did not already have a GED to support them toward that goal. Of the nine students who took and completed the class, two took the GED exam and passed, and three applied for promotions and got them.

Contributing to the success of the Schrock program is the involvement of Marty Baird, wife of Schrock's general manager, as the literacy program representative. For a one month period Marty and two tutors made themselves available during Schrock lunch hours to talk to interested employees about how to get reading help.

A plant expansion at Schrock will bring 270 new workers to the site this fall. Project P.A.L. will be ready to serve them.

A series of business breakfasts in October and November 1987, lead three businesses to begin referring employees to Project P.A.L. for offsite instruction: Vesuvius, U.S.A., a Charleston ceramic industry; Layco equipment company in Marshall; and Brach candy company in Sullivan.

Another business which supports Project P.A.L. is Walmart. The store has invited representatives to speak to employees, encourages employee participation and has allowed displays and posters to be exhibited.

"Support keeps growing," says Hemmett. "Partly through our business breakfasts, partly through support and referrals from LLCC's Center for Business and Industry, and partly through Schrock's pilot program." She says more and more businesses are hearing about literacy from their main offices. "Local managers seem to be more aware. They listen more intently these days," she says.

LAWRENCE ADULT CENTER
"VIA/Literacy"
Springfield
Anne Belletire, Business Liaison
217/525-3025

"We try to help employers realize how important incentives are. When employers offer release time from work, financial compensation, or recognition for improving basic skills, they tell an employee that he or she is valuable. And that really means something."

Judy Rake
Coordinator, VIA Literacy

VIA/Literacy (Volunteers in Action) began contacting Springfield area businesses in January 1986, after an information packet was developed to highlight the service VIA/Literacy could provide local employers. Initially, 20 businesses were contacted at random. Approximately 12 requested follow-up discussions.

As in Decatur, some city departments were interested in the program. Among them were the Springfield Streets Department, the Utilities Department, and the Office of the Mayor. Informational meetings were held during which each employee was asked to fill out a card, checking appropriate boxes to indicate whether or not he or she would be interested in working with a volunteer reading tutor to improve basic skills. In one department, 30 percent of those attending the meeting were interested in being tutored. Before long, some 20 city employees from various departments were working with VIA/Literacy.

After hearing VIA/Literacy presentations at the two Holiday Inns in Springfield, many employees signed up for reading assistance. Those with low level reading skills, 8 to 10 employees, were linked with VIA

tutors. Those with higher skills were referred to Lincoln Land Community College or to General Educational Development (GED) classes at Lawrence Adult Center.

When talking with area businesses, Anne Belletire, VIA/Literacy's business liaison, suggests they offer some type of employee incentive to show their support. At the Holiday Inn East, one day of compensatory time is given to employees who have been involved in the literacy program for six months. Aid to Retarded Citizens, an agency which encourages employees to serve as VIA tutors, provides one hour's wages for every two hours an employee spends tutoring.

When spe king to employee groups, Belletire has learned the value of staying after the meeting. Some of those she will need to speak with cannot easily be reached by phone, either at home or at work. She stays and talks with those who are willing to come forward.

While overall support from the Springfield business community is growing, with an increasing number of business representatives serving on the Sangamon Area Literacy Council, Belletire is disappointed that several major businesses are not as supportive as she had hoped. "They look upon reading assistance as just another employee benefit, failing to realize that increasing employee skills can increase productivity and safety, no matter what the setting," says Belletire.

One of these businesses has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which links employees with a variety of social services, such as family counseling and drug rehabilitation. Having been contacted by Belletire, the EAP will now look for the possibility of reading deficiencies when intakes are done. "If it's not an open door, at lease its a window," suggest Belletire. "It's a link other program might want to think about."

In the future, Belletire says she will urge businesses to set up onsite programs. She believes an onsite program would attract more employees because they would not have to find the extra time to commute to their classes.

CEFS Economic Opportunity Corporation
"CEFS Literacy Program"
Effingham
Chris Boyd, Literacy Coordinator
217/342-2195

"State public awareness campaigns have provided tremendous visibility of the problem generally. But, if workplace literacy programs are to be developed, it is essential that local providers make personal contact not only with management but with employees."

Chris Boyd
CEFS Literacy Program Director

Covering a seven-county rural area in south-central Illinois, the CEFS Economic Opportunity Corporation (CEFS) has been working with businesses and health care facilities. At Continental Bondware in Shelbyville, Chris Boyd, literacy coordinator, talked directly with approximately 500 employees during their work breaks in early 1987. She handed out pamphlets that asked if employees wished to become either tutors or students with the program and a brochure describing the services offered by CEFS.

Although the company requires a high school diploma for employment, Boyd found several employees at Continental Bondware reading at the fourth or fifth grade level. Some of them are now receiving one-on-one tutoring at the CEFS office.

CEFS also provides tutoring for employees of Sullivan Tubular, an automotive plant which employs approximately 200 workers. The program began in the fall of 1987 with optional testing of all employees, including managers. Only one employee declined to be tested. Following the testing, eight employees asked to be tutored one-on-one. Twelve are waiting to

participate in small group tutoring, in preparation for the GED. The group will begin meeting onsite as soon as the plant's workload will allow. Some of the tutoring will be done by employee volunteers.

Sullivan Tubular offers generous incentives for students and tutors. Employee tutors will receive one $50 savings bond for every 20 hours of volunteer tutoring. Employees enrolled in small group or one-on-one tutoring will receive one $50 savings bond for every grade their reading level increases. Students were asked to sign a release allowing CEFS to show their test scores to plant managers in order to qualify for incentives.

In the health care field, Boyd has developed onsite literacy programs with two nursing homes in Flora and hospital staffs in Pana and Shelbyville. At the Flora Care Center, administrator Norma Venters checked files to find those employees lacking a high school diploma and urged them to seek help through the CEFS literacy program. As a result, 11 of 85 employees are enrolled in an onsite GED class. Some of these were tutored individually in the beginning to advance their reading skills quickly. Employees were given release time to attend class.

Boyd says she will continue to approach area businesses seeking to talk to their employees about the literacy program. In addition, she will begin seeking inkind donations from businesses which do organize onsite literacy programs. In the coming year, the Effingham Chamber of Commerce will send out personal letters from Boyd with their monthly newsletter telling members about the program and encouraging them to consider participation by employees. The Chamber will cover the costs of mailing and duplication of materials.

Boyd also is working with Job Match, an agency which provides temporary placement for workers. While Job Match currently uses clerical skills' tests to assess applicants' abilities, the agency is considering including basic reading tests through CEFS as part of its service.

In February 1988 CEFS opened a computer learning lab for use by adult students from area businesses, health care facilities, and the Vandalia Correctional Center, as well as remedial students from the Effingham school district. Twenty adult students are currently using the lab, with assistance from a corps of volunteer tutors.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

While all of those interviewed for this report are in unanimous agreement that workplace literacy programs and workplace referral programs are needed and promise real benefits to employers, employees, and union members, many spoke of impediments to the development of such programs. Literacy coordinators, management, and union leaders need to be aware of these concerns so they can plan to address and overcome them as cooperative efforts expand.

The Initial Approach

WHOM SHOULD LITERACY COORDINATORS APPROACH TO INITIATE DISCUSSIONS ABOUT WORKPLACE LITERACY?

Coordinators are uncertain as to the best approach. In some cases, initial contact was made with company executives, in others with middle management, in still others, where workers were unionized, with the union leadership.

In a unionized company, initial contact with the union can help to dispel the feeling that employees who admit reading inadequacies risk losing jobs. However, without the support of a chief executive and, often, the personnel officer, the program cannot move forward. A coordinated and cooperative commitment by both management and labor is needed.

In nonunion companies, literacy coordinators reported instances where middle management contacts rejected the possibility that any of their employees had reading problems. Access to top management was closed as a result. Top company executives, where access has been available, have been receptive to the programs. When top management is approached and supportive, the program moves rapidly forward.

Most businesses are becoming aware of the national and state statistics being published on the problem of adult illiteracy, but many believe the problem is in another company, not their own. Coordinators need direction in the best approaches to convincing businesses it is in their own interest to assess employees and make them aware of education opportunities in the community.

The Location of Instruction and Incentives

WHEN A BUSINESS OR UNION DOES DECIDE TO ENDORSE A LITERACY PROGRAM, WHAT IS THE BEST LOCATION FOR INSTRUCTION TO OCCUR?

Literacy coordinators note a trend of limited participation among employees unless the class or tutoring is held onsite or at a local union hall, and teaches skills which are directly related to workplace needs. Many employees, especially those with families, find it difficult to take the extra time to attend classes if those classes are scheduled outside the workplace.

However, most coordinators find that there will be some employees, especially those reading at the lowest levels, who will not attend onsite classes unless mandated, due to embarrassment and fear of losing their jobs. For these employees, offsite one-on-one tutoring should be made available, with an eye to bringing these employees into a classroom situation once they have advanced to a more comfortable level.

Company incentives, such as work release time and compensation, provide additional motivation to employees. An active and positive approach by management, spelled out for workers at meetings which stress the benefits to both the company and the employees, has a strong impact on employee involvement.